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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: Is Vietnam Blocking BBC.com?

REF: 09 HANOI 909; 09 HANOI 378

11. (SBU) There is mounting, though inconclusive, evidence that access to the BBC's Vietnamese-language internet news site is becoming more difficult in Vietnam. According to a UK Political Officer, the British Embassy began to receive reports during last week's Tet Holiday suggesting that the BBC has been blocked by state-run internet service providers. The British Embassy has been collecting evidence of the apparent blockage and is assessing how to approach the GVN.

12. (SBU) The current situation appears similar to the beginning of last fall's blockage of Facebook.com, which remains blocked (ref. A), though the effects are uneven. Our own informal investigation as to which ISPs throughout Hanoi are blocking access produced mixed results. The largest ISP in Vietnam, FPT, allows some users access to the site while not allowing others. Several Embassy officers who have FPT provided high-speed internet at home were unable to access the BBC site. Additionally, the BBC site is also inaccessible on the non-OpenNet computers located in the American Center at the Embassy Annex also serviced by FPT. A call to FPT technical support yielded an interesting result when the technician could not at first access the site either. After he "refreshed" the page, he said it was then available on his local computer and was not aware of any technical issues from his end. A similar refreshing of the page on the computers in the American Center, however, did not resolve the issue. The online web aggregator Herdict.org reports that there have been two reports that [www.bbcvietnamese.com](#) is inaccessible. Alexa.com, a free online web traffic metrics tracker, lists BBC.co.uk as the 48th most visited website in Vietnam and Facebook.com as the 8th most visited.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: The GVN had previously taken a comparatively lax approach to bloggers and the internet, interceding only when on-line opinions translated into political action (Ref B). By blocking Facebook and now, possibly, the BBC's Vietnamese-language site, the government seems to have fully awakened to the power of the Internet to mobilize and to inform -- and in so doing, may be taking a page from China's playbook. Blocking BBC is particularly disturbing given that it is widely read and remains the only non-GVN managed news service that publishes daily in Vietnamese (RFA and VOA are effectively inaccessible without proxy servers). The site is a particularly good source of information on human rights issues, often drawing on topics current in the Vietnamese blogosphere, and features frequent interviews with political dissidents and editorials authored by dissidents. In the past week alone, BBCVietnamese.com has run feature articles on: Thich Nhat Hanh's call for the release of political prisoners, interviews with three high-profile political dissidents (two now living in exile abroad) on spending Tet in prison, and debate about logging along the Vietnamese border with China. END COMMENT.

4. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Ho Chi Minh City.
Michalak